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THE ARCHITECTURE OF DILLARD UNIVERSITY 1933-1997



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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1954 I had the good fortune to secure a summer job with the well-established New Orleans architectural firm of Goldstein, Parham & Labouisse. Working in an architect's office was a required part of a student's education at the Tulane School of Architecture and since I was between my third and fourth year of the five year program at the school I had to seek employment, for credit, if not for the minimal pay. What a stroke of luck it was that Mr. Moise H. Goldstein, one of the most respected architects in New Orleans and a real gentleman of the "old school", immediately took an interest in me. At that time the office was finishing up drawings for the new Chapel at Dillard University. I was fascinated with the workings of the office, and all that went into making the working drawings used to instruct the building contractor in building the structure that had been conceived in the architect's mind. And, I just adored the design of the Chapel.

The Chapel was the first building at Dillard with which I would become affiliated. I had no idea that working for this firm would eventually lead to my close association with Dillard and its buildings for the next 43 years. I returned to the office of Goldstein, Parham & Labouisse during the summers of 1955 and again in 1956, after graduating from the Tulane Architecture School. But, the Army had other plans for me and I was quickly drafted into military service for two years, serving eventually in the combat engineers in Germany. This was definitely not a hardship post! Peace time, of German descent, in the land of Wagner (whose music I just loved), good beer, and more. After returning from that real holiday I began working full time for the GP&L firm.

In the years that followed, the Dillard campus doubled in size, with new buildings and additions to existing ones. I was involved in all of these projects, first in the offices of Goldstein, Parham & Labouisse and subsequently Parham & Labouisse. I came to know very well Presidents Dent, Butler, and Cook, and worked untiringly with them and Vice President for Fiscal Affairs, Charles C. Teamer, on the design of all of the buildings through 1997. After the dissolution of the firm of Parham & Labouisse I joined Dillard in 1972 as University Architect. As the sole practicing survivor of the firm I fortunately was able to bring with me all of the inherited original drawings of the Dillard buildings. These drawings are a visual history of the building of the university.

This book reveals the history of the buildings of Dillard through the drawings in the collection, and from my personal experiences. I am happy to have been a vital part of the development of the Dillard campus. I could not have had better people with whom to work, and to create such a rich architectural heritage.

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A BRIEF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF THE DILLARD UNIVERSITY CAMPUS 1933 - 1997

Dillard University, a private, non-sectarian, liberal arts institution, was formed in 1930, the result of the merging of New Orleans University and Straight College. Situated in the Gentilly neighborhood of New Orleans, it was named in honor of James Hardy Dillard, whose distinguished service in the education of African Americans in the South forms an important chapter in the history of American education. The majestic Avenue of the Oaks, recently named the *Rosa Freeman Keller Avenue of the Oaks of Dillard University*, draws one's view down to the impressive white antebellum structure of Kearny Hall, the student union building. It was not by accident that this imposing vista came about. Long time president Dr. Albert W. Dent was instrumental in laying out these trees with the assistance of Moise H. Goldstein, the architect responsible for the original concept and initial master plan of the buildings of the university.

It was almost seventy years ago when the first building of the Dillard University campus was erected. This then unnamed antebellum style Library Building contained an elegant two-story wood paneled library in the rear center wing, while the rest of the structure housed a number of classrooms and a few rooms devoted to administration. Architect Moise H. Goldstein continued, until his retirement in the early sixties, to be the guiding hand in all subsequent building designs for the campus. In the years that followed, the firm went through several name changes: Moise H Goldstein and Associates; Goldstein, Parham and Labouisse; Goldstein and Goldstein (including son Louis Goldstein); and Parham and Labouisse (descendants of the Goldstein, Parham and Labouisse firm after Moise Goldstein's retirement in 1962). It is interesting that in the long history of the building of the Dillard campus there has always been a continuity of designers and firms. I, myself, was associated directly as architect with Goldstein, Parham and Labouisse, and Parham and Labouisse. After the dissolution of the firm of Parham and Labouisse I became University Architect for Dillard, my office housed on the Dillard campus. The major part of my work with those firms was in the design of the Dillard buildings. In the building boom of the sixties, almost half of the buildings of Dillard's campus were constructed, as well as additions and renovations to existing buildings. When Parham and Labouisse dissolved in 1972 I was very fortunate to be able to bring to the university all of the original drawings for every building. In the words that follow I would like to give a short description of the major buildings and how their design and the design of the campus came about.

Goldstein's concept was a formal design with the oak trees forming the major axis. By the early fifties three major buildings in the design were completed: *Kearny Hall* (the student union building, at the end of the Avenue of the Oaks); *Rosenwald Hall* on the left (the original library and classroom building named in 1948 after Julius Rosenwald); and *Stern Hall* on the right (housing the Division of Natural Sciences, named in 1952 after Edgar B. Stern). The president's residence, a guest house and five faculty cottages were also part of the initial set of buildings and were set along the perimeter of the horseshoe shaped road entered from Gentilly Boulevard. *Stern Hall* was built in the early fifties and is an exact exterior copy of *Rosenwald Hall*. These two buildings provide a formal frame for *Kearny Hall* in the distance. Prior to the completion of this very impressive three-building axial design, two dormitories were built: *Hartzell Hall*, for men, on the west side of the center axis, and *Straight Hall*, for women, on the east side. They are in complete harmony with the design of the elegant *Rosenwald Hall* but on a much smaller scale. Care was taken to put both of these buildings beyond the outer limits of the oak trees to maintain open and green spaces.

In addition to the above buildings, mention should be made of the five wood-frame faculty residences, the brick duplex faculty residence (unfortunately recently demolished) toward the rear of the campus, and the *Howard Guest House* (situated between the *President's Residence* and *Straight Hall*). These structures were also built in these early years (See Appendix D). The five wood-frame faculty residences were moved (not demolished) from the campus in early 1960 so that the roadway could be rerouted to make space for the new *Will Alexander Library*, built in 1961. *Howard House* was expanded in 1946, and is used today for academic purposes.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Goldstein may not have intended the wide open space between Rosenwald and Stern Halls, that became the *Avenue of the Oaks*. A drawing bearing his name as architect shows a "complete" campus plan with a rather imposing domed building on the center axis. (See Appendix B). This very handsome building was to house administrative offices. A rendering of the building does exist. (See Appendix C). In the collection of original drawings of the Dillard buildings only a few structural drawings exist for this domed structure. Where the rest of the drawings are and why this concept was abandoned is not known by this writer. In any event, the unencumbered and wide open *Avenue of the Oaks* has become one of the major architectural features of the university - if perhaps by fate.

There is an interesting story about the design and construction of the first dormitory buildings, *Hartzell & Straight*. When they were designed and built in the late thirties, the standard practice for architects was to produce only basic drawings to give to the building contractor for construction purposes. I remember Mr. Goldstein telling me that it was more of a "gentlemen's agreement" than a legal building contract. A hand-shake was very binding. Consequently, the drawings for *Hartzell Hall* (the first to be built) were done on just eight sheets, two of which were furniture plans. Since *Straight Hall* was an exact mirror image, both interior and exterior, of *Hartzell* flopped over to the other side of the oak tree axis, it was decided to use the same drawings by printing the sheets in reverse! Because of the reversal of the sheets, notes on the drawings would also come out in reverse. This problem was solved by erasing all of the notes and dimensions on the front of the sheet and then re-lettering them on the reverse side of the sheet with the original drawings remaining on the front side! A rather ingenious idea, and a time saving one at that but one that has deprived us of a set of really *original* drawing for *Hartzell Hall*.

With this formal design now set (*Rosenwald* and *Stern Halls* on the front, *Kearny Hall* in the rear, *Hartzell* and *Straight Halls* on the sides, all neatly place around the *Avenue of the Oaks*) subsequent buildings have been added in the outer spaces in a careful manner to harmonize with the overall integrity of the original concept. Of major importance was the building of the *Lawless Memorial Chapel* in 1955. Placed to the west of *Rosenwald Hall* off the main axis, its L-shaped design is set around one of the most impressive and beautiful live oak trees in the city. It is quite visible from Gentilly Boulevard but does not distract from the rigid formality of the design concept. This colonial style structure was designed primarily by F. Monroe Labouisse shortly after the architectural firm became Goldstein, Parham and Labouisse. From this point onward in the firm, every subsequent Dillard building had input from Labouisse. Also of major importance were the extensive additions to both *Rosenwald* and *Stern Hall*. Identical wings were added to each on both the east and west sides in the sixties.

Additions to *Stern Hall* included extensive new areas assigned to the Division of Nursing. Dillard has always maintained an outstanding school for nursing. Its early connection with Flint Goodridge Hospital provided a practice ground for students and graduates. In addition to the nursing facilities, extensive additions were made to the science laboratories, classrooms, and faculty offices. In *Rosenwald Hall* the additions included many new classrooms and faculty offices, and much needed additional space for administrative offices. One of the major projects in *Rosenwald* was the addition of another floor in the

center wing that originally housed the elegant library mentioned above. Needless to say, the library by this time had outgrown its confined area in this building and a new structure for it was built in 1961, the *Will Alexander Library*, placed directly behind the *Lawless Chapel*. This building, designed by Labouisse, is a rather contemporary design with a slightly curved front and aluminum frame windows. Labouisse succeeded in making it look right at home with the rest of the campus. Needed additions were also made to *Kearny Hall*, the student union building. Additions were made to all four dormitory buildings, *Hartzell*, *Camphor*, *Williams*, and *Straight*. One of these additions was done by the office of Goldstein and Goldstein, the only campus work by this firm; the others came out of the office of Parham and Labouisse, descendants of the Goldstein, Parham & Labouisse firm.

The last major structure under the administration of Dr. Dent was the Health and Physical Education building that bears his name, *Albert W. Dent Hall*. This houses a gym, Olympic size swimming pool and various other areas associated with physical education. In outward appearance it is akin to the *Will Alexander Library*, with similar design proportions.

Mention must be made of the apartment complex owned by Dillard that adjoins the university on the west side. Built in 1950, and called *Gentilly Gardens*, it contains a number of wood frame structures with single and multi-bedroom living units. This complex was laid out with the assistance of landscape architect, William S. Wiedorn. Mr. Wiedorn also assisted untiringly in the continued landscaping of the campus until his death in 1989.

In 1969 a three-family residence was constructed at 2401 Gentilly Blvd. adjacent to the London Ave. Canal. Designed by Mr. Labouisse, the major part of it became the home of Dr. and Mrs. Dent after Dr. Dent's retirement from the university. It is a very cleverly designed structure, a seemingly single-story single-family residence adjoining a two-story apartment structure. Actually, the Dent part of the complex goes imperceptibly into the first floor of the two-story structure thereby providing much more room than the exterior would indicate.

Dr. Broadus N. Butler succeeded Dr. Dent as president of the university in 1970. During his relatively short administration further additions were made to the dormitories. In 1974 Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook succeeded Dr. Butler. The most important architectural improvement to take place under Dr. Cook's administration was the fulfillment of the thirty year dream of a Fine Arts Building. Mr. Labouisse and I

worked on a preliminary design for this in the early sixties, but for various reasons it was never built. Finally, in the early nineties, it was decided to go forward with the project, due to the increased size of the student body and a definite need for such a center. The building was dedicated in March 1993 and subsequently named the *Samuel DuBois Cook Fine Arts and Communications Center*. Besides music, art, and drama, the structure also contains state of the art mass communications facilities.

In the late eighties Dillard swapped roughly twenty-six acres of land on the west side of the London Ave. Canal for a little over nine acres fronting on Gentilly Boulevard, owned by the New Orleans Parkway Commission. The twenty-six acres were not easily accessible and were more usable by the Parkway Commission for nursery space. Acquiring the land along Gentilly Boulevard was a boon for the university. It was an important acquisition for Dillard because of its impressive visibility from Gentilly Boulevard. It is on this piece of property that the *Cook Center* was placed, the first major structure since the sixties. An architectural firm had to be chosen that was sympathetic to the overall design concept originally conceived by Moise Goldstein and supported over the years by the Board of Trustees. A formal search was made and The Mathes Group of New Orleans was selected. The tie with previous designers of the campus continued since two principals in that firm, Michael R. Howard and Ann Schmuelling, were former students of mine at the Tulane School of Architecture. The Mathes Group also designed east and west wing additions to *Kearny Hall* which were completed in 1996.

Thanks to the effectiveness of the Dillard Board of Trustees, and the leadership of Presidents Dent, Butler, and Cook in preserving and nurturing Moise Goldstein's initial concept, the Dillard University campus has been called one of the most beautiful in America. I am very honored and proud to have been part of the architectural history of this outstanding institution.

The above history appeared in abbreviated form in the June 1995 issue of "Preservation in Print", published by The Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans..